DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 426 148 UD 032 703

TITLE Accountability for Student Performance: An Annotated Resource Guide for Shaping an Accountability Plan for Your Charter School.

INSTITUTION Charter Friends National Network, St. Paul, MN.
PUB DATE 1998-06-00
NOTE 16p.
AVAILABLE FROM Charter Friends National Network, 1355 Pierce Butler Route, Suite 100, St. Paul, MN 55104; Tel: 612-644-5270; Fax: 651-645-0240; e-mail: info@charterfriends.org; Web site: www.charterfriends.org;
PUB TYPE Guides - Non-Classroom (055)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Academic Achievement; *Accountability; *Charter Schools; *Educational Assessment; Educational Objectives; *Educational Planning; Elementary Secondary Education; Resource Materials; *Resources; School Choice; Standards

ABSTRACT

This report suggests that charter schools need to consider six critical questions as they develop a student accountability plan for their school. These questions are: (1) "What is our school's mission?"; (2) "What do we want our students to know and be able to do?"; (3) "How will we know whether our students are achieving or attaining the goals and standards specified in our charter"?; (4) "How will we gather and monitor the necessary student performance information?"; (5) "How will we set and measure progress toward school performance goals?"; and (6) "How will we use the student and school performance information we have gathered?" For each of these questions, resources are listed. These include printed materials, web sites, and organizations with expertise in charter schools. (SLD)

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Accountability for Student Performance

An Annotated Resource Guide for
Shaping an Accountability Plan for Your Charter School

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CFNN

NATIONAL NETWORK

June 1998

UD032703

About this Guide...

The origins of this resource guide lie in informal conversations over the past year among the directors of a number of state charter school resource centers and others on the need to strengthen accountability systems in charter schools. An informal survey of resource center directors by Charter Friends National Network in early 1998 also found this issue to be the top priority concern of the centers and the schools they represent.

To begin to focus this conversation, the Friends Network helped convene about thirty "Friends Group" leaders, chartering authority officials, school leaders, and other national experts on assessment and accountability for a two-day meeting in early February. Out of this meeting, a smaller working group developed and circulated a six-point framework for schools to help them design and implement their own accountability programs. This resource guide is an extension of that framework and is intended to be the first in a series of assessment and accountability tools that will be developed and made available to schools through the resource centers.

Among the resource center leaders who helped draft and circulate the six-point framework were Robin Steans, Leadership for Quality Education in Chicago, Eric Premack and Laurie Gardener, California Charter School Development Center and Sarah Tantillo, New Jersey Charter School Resource Center. A complete list of individuals who participated in the February meeting may be found on page 14 of this resource guide.

This resource guide is being distributed through a number of charter school resource centers and other state-based charter support organizations. Individual copies are also available at no charge to charter school operators and planners by contacting Charter Friends National Network, 1355 Pierce Butler Route, Suite 100, St. Paul, MN 55104; 612-644-5270; 612-645-0240 (fax) or via e-mail at info@charterfriends.org

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INTRODUCTION

At some point, every charter school undertakes the important, but somewhat daunting, task of developing a student performance accountability plan -- a plan for determining what its students should know and be able to do, how the school will determine whether they have achieved these goals and how student performance will relate to the charter granting and renewal process.

Six critical questions need to be considered as schools begin developing their accountability plan.

What follows is an outline of six critical questions charter school developers need to consider as they develop a student accountability plan for their school. In addition, we have tried to pull together and list some of the existing resources (human and written) that are available as you consider these questions.

The six key questions – and related resources – are:

I. **What is our school's mission?**
II. **What do we want our students to know and be able to do?**
III. **How will we know whether our students are achieving or attaining the goals and standards we specified in our charter?**
IV. **How will we gather and monitor the necessary student performance information?**
V. **How will we set and measure progress toward school performance goals?**
VI. **How will we use the student and school performance information we have gathered?**

There are, of course, many more sources of advice and assistance than we could detail in this brief Guide. There are also additional needs for "assessment tools" that we've identified and that need to be developed. A number of charter school resource center centers are now working together to develop many of these tools in ways that are specifically geared to charters.

As those tools are developed, they will be made available to schools through the resource center in each state. In the meantime, this guide should give you a place to start in thinking through the development of a student performance and school accountability for your school.

QUESTION #1
What is our school's mission?

Before you can meaningfully delve into what you want your students to know and be able to do when they graduate and how you will monitor progress against these goals, you will need to establish a clear mission for the school as a whole. A mission statement is usually only a brief statement of purpose; however, a well-developed statement forces stakeholders to clarify exactly what it is they are about. This process ensures that relevant parties share a common vision and helps shape future decisions. Typically, mission statements answer three key questions: who you seek to serve, what you seek to accomplish, and how you will proceed (i.e., what methods you will use).

A well-developed mission statement forces stakeholders to clarify exactly what it is they are about.

Currently Available Reference Materials:

For other examples of mission statements, more background on what constitutes a good mission statement, and how they can be effectively developed, you may want to refer to the following:

- "Managing the Nonprofit Organization," pages 3-8, by Peter Drucker
- The federal charter schools web site (www.uschartergehools.org tech_assit ta_mission.htm)
- Chapter 2 of the "Charter School Handbook," Pioneer Institute Charter School Resource Center http: www.pioneerinstitute.org csrc ch2.html
- Pages 10-12 of the "Charter School Development Guide," by Eric Premack

QUESTION #2:
What do we want our students to know and be able to do?

The next step in developing an accountability plan is to identify what it is you want your students to know and be able to do when they graduate. This typically involves establishing a set of student performance standards, goals, and outcomes. Many are able to accelerate the standards-setting process by referring to existing standards setting efforts at the local, state, and national level.

Some schools may be required to conform or adhere to local or state standards, depending on your state charter laws and processes. Developing a school's standards is a technically - challenging task. It usually consists of several steps such as (1) articulating desired characteristics of "educated" students at a general level, (2) breaking these general qualities and goals into more concrete graduation or exit standards, and (3) benchmarking these exit standards down into specific and measurable grade-age-level content and performance standards.

A good school accountability plan typically includes a set of student performance standards, goals and outcomes.

Currently Available Reference Materials:

For suggestions on how to select and set student performance goals and standards as well as examples of some highly regarded standards, see:

- Raising the Standard," by Doyle and Pimentel. This book provides concrete process suggestions on how to establish and implement a standards-setting effort at the school district level. It also contains some brief information on assessment and accountability matters, as well as a CD ROM disk containing examples of standards and standards setting. To order, call (800) 499-9774.

- The Thomas B. Fordham Foundation has published reviews and rankings of state-level standards documents in five "core subjects, including English, history. Geography, math, and science. The reports are available on the web at: (www.edexcellence.net) and single copies may be ordered for free by calling 1-888-TBF-1474.

- "Navigating the Standards Maze," by Laude Gardner/Charter Schools Development Center. This briefing paper provides specific process and technical guidance to charter developers in California. Many of the paper's general principles are helpful in other states. The paper is on the web at the following address: (www.csus.edu ier charter standardsmaze.html).

- A Comprehensive Guide to Designing Standards-Based Districts, Schools, and Classrooms," by Marzano and Kendall, published by McREL" and ASCD (www.escd.org).

- "Content Knowledge, a Compendium of Standards and Benchmarks for K-12 Education, by Marzano and Kendall. Some of this catalog-sized document is available on the web

(www.mcrel.org). This large book contains nearly 250 standards and related benchmarks in 11 major disciplines (ranging from math, to language arts, to "life skills,). It seems to borrow heavily from, and provides brief descriptions of, the major national-level standards-setting efforts in many subject areas. It only briefly references state-level efforts.

- The New Standards Project sells its sets of performance standards in English language arts, mathematics, science, and applied learning. They also offer aligned assessment instruments including standardized tests (by Harcourt Brace) and portfolio systems. More information is available through the web at www.newstandards.org
-
- "Charter School Development Guide." (pages 12-20) by Eric Premack
- Many states' standards and national standards documents are available on the web via the Putnam Valley School District's standards web (www.putwest.boces.org). This site also has a large number of standards-related links.

QUESTION #3:
How will we know whether our students are achieving or attaining the goals and standards we specified in our charter?

Put another way, how can your school ensure that students are making strong progress toward your school's standards or goals? Will you want to develop portfolios over the course of their time at the school? Will you develop some exit examinations or performance assessments to be administered just before graduation? Will you rely on standardized test scores? Or will you use some combination of these tools to determine when and if your students truly qualify for a diploma or to move on to a higher grade level?

Most schools find that it is necessary to assemble a mix of assessments and measurement practices. The school should select testing and measurement tools, each of which is an appropriate, valid, and reliable method for measuring progress toward achieving each of the school's major goals and standards.

A well-balanced set of assessments will likely include a range of methods, the familiar standardized basic academic skills tests or

more sophisticated publisher developed tests, to less traditional "alternative" or "authentic" assessment and measurement practices such as systems for assembling and judging portfolios of student work, performance tasks or presentations judged by "Juries" and graduation committees.

Sometimes these measurement practices are as simple as monitoring and tracking student attendance and discipline data, data on student community service projects, college entrance, and the like.

As you try to answer these questions, you will want to consider (1) what form(s) of assessment are most appropriate for each of the individual skills and competencies you are trying to measure, and (2) who should administer each assessment (e.g., a teacher may be best suited to help compile a portfolio of student work, but you might want an outside party to evaluate pieces of the portfolio or to review a student's exit performance).

Schools will want to consider both what types of assessments are most appropriate and who should administer each assessment

Currently Available Reference Materials:

Assessment in General:

- Chapter 5 of "Raising the Standard," by Doyle and Pimentel, contains a very *brief* overview of several major types of assessment tools and basic process tips on how to establish an assessment system.

- The ERIC clearinghouse on Assessment and Evaluation's web site contains an extensive array of links at: (http:/Ieric.ae2.edu.cua.edu). Unfortunately many of these links are technical or theoretical in nature.

- Rummaging Through the Assessment Toolbox, by Laurie Gardner/Charter Schools Development Center. This California-oriented briefing paper provides an overview and process suggestion on how to assemble a student assessment system for charter school developers. (Currently in draft form.)

- Beyond Testing: Toward a New Theory of Educational Attainment, by Caroline Gipps (Falmer Press). This theory-oriented book provides a balanced overview of current thinking on the strengths, weaknesses, and appropriate uses of various assessment and measurement practices.

- There are a large number of college and university texts on student testing and assessment, many of which are accessible to

a lay audience. "Educational Assessment of Students," by Anthony Nitko (Merrill/Prentice Hall) is one such text that provides a helpful overview.

Standardized Testing:

- "Understanding Achievement Tests: A Guide for School Administrators," edited by Larry Rudner. This brief book is currently available on a Gopher site on the ERIC web site listed above. This booklet provides a simple, jargon-free, overview of standardized achievement tests for the lay reader. Though nearly a decade old, it's still quite helpful.

- For a brief description of several standardized and non-standardized instruments suggested for use by charter schools, see the CAREI web site at http://carei.coled.umn.edu/CharterSchools/apr97assessment/toc.htm. These instruments include both basic academic skills tests as well as tests to measure affective variables that are central to many charter schools' missions.

"Alternative/Authentic" Assessment:

- Alternative assessment guru Grant Wiggins' CLASS web site contains order forms for several publications along with a rubric database at: www.classnj.org

- The Coalition of Essential Schools (CES) pioneered much of the work in alternative assessment. Visit their web site at: www.ces.brown.edu for lists of articles, books, and research papers on such topics as essential elements of exhibitions and how to get started with digital portfolios.

- The National Center for Fair and Open Testing publishes a guide on alternative assessment and offers guidelines on the fair and ethical use of tests and assessments. Most are available for download or order via their web site: www.fairtest.org

Portfolios: (collections of student work over time and *exhibition* (public performances before panels of judges):

- See the Coalition's web site (above) for publications on creating digital portfolios, including tips for getting started, case studies of schools using digital portfolios, and lists of commercial portfolio software programs.

Assessments should be tailored to the mission and goals of each school and may include a combination of standardized tests, alternative or "authentic" assessments, portfolios, and alternative graduation assessments.

- Those wishing to visit schools that are currently using portfolios, exhibitions, and graduation performance assessment can call the Coalition of Essential Schools' main office at (401) 863-3384 to get the listing of their local CES office. These local CES offices can then provide lists of schools in the areas which are incorporating alternative assessments and which are open to visitation.

- In California, The Open School (K-8, Los Angeles) is using electronic portfolios for all of their students. Guajome Park Academy Charter School in Vista also utilizes digital and other portfolios and requires students to present exhibitions on a regular basis.

- CRESST, a federally funded assessment research consortium, maintains a database of alternative assessment tools (http://cresst96.cse.ucla.edu/database.htm).

Alternative graduation assessment:

- Central Park East Secondary School in New York City pioneered the concept of requiring prospective graduates to develop cumulative portfolios and present them in a series of exhibitions to a "graduation committee" which assesses which skills and graduation readiness according to staff and student-developed rubrics. Several other high schools, including Fenway Middle College High School in Boston, MA, have developed similar systems. To find out more about Fenway's work, contact Jennifer London at the Center for Collaborative Education, (617) 242-7730.

- The Corporation for Business, Work, and Learning in Boston has developed an alternative graduation program called "Diploma Plus" which includes graduation portfolios and exhibitions, alignment of assessment with state and local standards, and a strong school-to career component. Their "Implementation Manual" includes standards documents rubrics, and relevant articles regarding alternative assessments. Contact Alex Hoffinger at (617) 727-8158. Many other high schools, including Central Park East and the City on a Hill Charter School in Boston have developed similar systems.

QUESTION #4:
How will we gather and monitor the necessary student performance information?

Once you know what information you will need to collect, the challenge becomes one of doing the actual collecting in a way that minimizes paperwork while maximizing the available useful data for multiple audiences. Different charter schools have approached this problem in distinct ways. Some have chosen to stick with paper and pencil record keeping. Others are using relatively sophisticated information systems that allow them to track student assignments, performance (both academic and behavioral), attendance, etc. on the computer.

Currently Available Reference Materials:

If this more "high-tech approach appeals to your school, you will want more information about what sort of software packages are available, the differences between them and what current users would recommend. Here are two available software options and the schools that are using them:

- The Academy of the Pacific Rim worked with a computer consultant to customize a Microsoft Access database (a popular piece of data management software) to suit their needs. What developed was a system that allows the school to both align and monitor teacher lesson plans, student performance data, and student behavior and skills taught with the school's student standards. For more details, call Stacey Boyd, Director (617) 361-0050.

- IMS - Community Day Charter School is using IMS, a proprietary database developed by the Modern Red Schoolhouse design team to track its student information. Call Joey Merrill at (508) 681-9910 for more information.

QUESTION #5:
How will we set and measure progress toward school performance goals?

Though student performance is perhaps the most important aspect of a charter school's mission, most also agree that it is critical for schools to be well-managed, fiscally solvent, and safe entices that are in compliance with all applicable laws and the terms of their charters. In addition to setting and monitoring student performance, charter schools need to be able to set school performance goals and monitor them in an appropriate fashion.

Currently Available Reference Materials:

- Charter School Technical Advisory 97-1, Massachusetts Department of Education. A "must read," containing an overview of Massachusetts' student performance and school accountability oversight practices at www.pioneerinstitute.org/csrc/appd2.htm

- "Minding the Charter Store: Accountability for Sound School Operations," Eric Premack/Charter Schools Development Center. This briefing paper outlines how California charter schools can address school performance matters, with a focus on operational issues. (Currently in draft form.)

- The Colorado League of Charter Schools is piloting a charter school "visitation and review" process whereby a team of experts (including charter folks) visit charter schools, interview staff, students, parents, and board members, and perform a broad based review of the school's operations and alignment with their charter. Call Jim Griffin, the League's director, at 303-989-5356 for more information.

- The Annenberg Institute is currently working in collaboration with the Boston Pilot Schools Network in Boston, MA to develop a system of school performance accountability. They have created several documents, including questionnaires for outside and inside evaluators, rubrics to assess the school's teaching and learning program and other aspects of the school's operations. They have plans to create a "How to Create a School Portfolio" guide over the next year. Contact Frank Barnes at the Annnenberg Institute for more information: (401) 863-7990, ext. 3642.

Chartering authorities play a critical role in overseeing progress the school is making in achieving its goals.

QUESTION #6: How will we use the student and school performance information we have gathered?

In answering this question, you will want to consider the different audiences you want to reach and inform -- and the reasons you need to inform them. These may include (1) parents and students, (2) the chartering agency, (3) the broader public, and (4) teachers and school board members.

Some possibilities include annual reports that you can send to authorizers, teachers and parents ant informational brochures that you can use in recruiting and marketing. One school holds an annual "stakeholders meeting" that is structured much like a corporation's annual shareholders' meeting, where information regarding student and school performance is presented to the charter "community," including students, staff, parents, the media, and charter-granting agency staff.

In addition, schools and charter granting agencies need to develop mutually-agreeable processes for receiving, reviewing, monitoring, and discussing student and school performance data in a constructive and responsible fashion--and agree how this will relate to the charter monitoring, oversight, revocation, and renewal processes. This is especially important in states where charter-granting agencies have not been fully attentive to their monitoring responsibilities.

Currently Available Reference Materials:

- "Charter School Technical Advisory 97-1," Massachusetts Department of Education, and "Guidelines for Developing a Charter School Accountability Plan,"Rosenblum Brigham Associates at www.pioneerinstitute.org/csrc/appd3.htm

- "Building Accountability Into the Charter Contract (including suggested annual report outline)," Eric Premack/Schools Development Center. (Currently in draft form.)

- Forthcoming policies from Washington D.C.'s independent charter granting board, Boston School District Pilot School accountabilities process, and forthcoming policies from the Chicago Public Schools.

- For examples of well-laid out and effective annual reports and brochures, see:
    - City on a Hill Charter School, Annual Report
    - Garfield Charter School, Annual Report

Acknowledgements

As noted above, a number of resource center directors and others made significant contributions to developing this resource guide. Those attending the two-day meeting convened by the Friends Network and other groups in February of 1998 were: Grace Arnold, Open Charter School, Los Angeles, CA; Stacy Boyd, Academy of the Pacific Rim, Hyde Park, MA; Ralph Brauer, Minnesota Association of Charter Schools, St. Paul, MN; Stella Cheung, Center for School Change, U of M, Minneapolis; Sharon Damore, consultant to the Chicago Public Schools, Chicago, IL; Cathy DeBoer and Bob DeBoer, New Visions School, Minneapolis, MN; Mary Gifford, Arizona Charter School Resource Center, Phoenix; Jim Goenner, Michigan Association of Public School Academies, Lansing, MI; Jim Griffin, Colorado League of Charter Schools; Bruce Hall, College of Education, USF, Tampa, FL; Connie Hines, College of Education, USF, Tampa, FL; Stephanie Jackson, Institute for At-Risk Children and Families, USF, Tampa, FL; Mark Kenney, Kauffman Foundation, Kansas City, MO; Ed Kirby, Massachusetts Department of Education, Boston, MA; Joan Lange, Challenge Foundation, Bonita Springs, FL; Carolyn Lavely, Institute for At-Rick Children and Families, USF, Tampa; David Mack, DC Public Charter School Board, Washington, DC; Karen Mann, Florida Charter School Association, Tampa, FL; Bruno Manno, Hudson Institute, Washington, DC; Joey Morrill, Community Day Charter School, Lawrence, MA; Shirley Monastra, Committee on Public Education, Washington, DC; Jennifer Nahas, Massachusetts Charter School Resource Center, Boston, MA; Joe Nathan, Center for School Change, U of M, Minneapolis, MN; Cathy Nehf, Walton Family Foundation, Boulder, CO; Eric Premack, California Charter Schools Development Center, Sacramento, CA; Jeremy Resnick, Charter School Project, Duquesne University, Pittsburgh, PA; Greg Richmond, Chicago School District, Chicago, IL; Jon Schroeder, Charter Friends National Network, St. Paul, MN; John Schultz, Minnesota New Country School, LeSueur, MN; Nancy Smith, New Twin Cities Charter School Project, Minneapolis, MN; Robin Steans, Leadership for Quality Education, Chicago, IL; Sarah Tantillo, New Jersey Charter School Resource Center, New Brunswick, NJ; Bill Windler, Colorado Department of Education, Denver, CO; Cathy Wooley-Brown, Institute for At-Risk Children and Families, USF, Tampa, FL; Cindy Zautcke, Wisconsin Charter School Resource Center, Milwaukee, WI.

About the growing role of "Charter Friends..."

Charter schools are borne out of the passion and commitment of their founders and the educational needs of the students and communities they serve. But even the best charter founders and operators cannot succeed entirely in isolation. They require an infrastructure of technical and informational support to help design quality schools, obtain charters, and launch and successfully sustain their school operations.

In response to these needs, a number of **state and sub-state resource centers and other charter sup-port organizations** are emerging throughout the country. Some of these organizations were initially established to help build public awareness and legislative support for state charter school laws. Once laws are passed, their attention tends to focus on recruiting and assisting charter applicants and providing charter operators ongoing technical assistance and other forms of support.

These "Charter Friends" organizations assist charters with a **variety of issues and needs** including school planning, governance, financing, curriculum, assessment and accountability, facilities, and other ingredients in starting and running high quality schools. Most are privately funded non-profit organizations, but they sometimes charge fees to help cover the cost of their operations. They attract fiscal and administrative support from foundations, businesses, think tanks, academic institutions, and individuals. They are most often organized on a state-level, but sometimes have a more narrow geographic focus within a state

About the Charter Friends National Network...

Just as no charter school can succeed in total isolation, state and sub-state "Charter Friends" organizations have found value in the relationships and support they gain from each other. With charter schools now authorized in 33 states and the District of Columbia, both the number of these organizations and the potential for mutual shared support have grown rapidly.

In response to these needs and opportunities, **Charter Friends National Network** was established in early 1997 as a project of the St. Paul-based Center for Policy Studies in cooperation with Hamline University.

The Network's mission is to **promote the charter opportunity by helping start and strengthen re-source centers and other state-level charter support organizations**. The Network pursues its mission through publications, conferences, on-line communications, a grant program, and multi-state initiatives on high priority issues. In 1998, these initiatives include charter school accountability, facilities financing, governance and special education.

Charter Friends National Network began as an expansion of the work of **Ted Kolderie**, senior associate at the Center for Policy Studies and a leader in the national charter movement from its beginning. Its director is **Jon Schroeder** a veteran Minnesota policy analyst and journalist who played a major role in the design and passage of the federal charter grant program as policy director for former U.S. Senator Dave Durenberger. Leading the Network's outreach initiative is **Eric Premack**, who heads the Charter Schools Development Center at California State University and is one of the nation's top experts on both charter school policy and operations.

For more information on the Network and its activities, or to obtain additional copies of this guide, contact: Charter Friends National Network, 1355 Pierce Butler Route, Suite 100, St. Paul, MN 55104; 612-644-5236 (voice); 612-645-0240 (fax); info@charterfriends.org (e-mail); or www.charterfriends.org (web site).

CHARTER FRIENDS
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connecting and supporting state-level charter school initiatives

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